

**DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
REVISED LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT #10 (MANAGEMENT
INDICATOR SPECIES)
NATIONAL FORESTS IN FLORIDA
(BAKER, COLUMBIA, FRANKLIN, LAKE, LEON, LIBERTY, MARION, PUTNUM, OKALOOSA, SANTA ROASA, WAKULLA,
AND WALTON COUNTIES, FLORIDA)**

DECISION

Based upon my review of the Forest Plan Amendment #10 Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative 2. This amendment will:

- 1) Remove the bald eagle, large-mouth bass, pileated woodpecker, Prothonotary warbler, sand skink, southeastern kestrel, white-tailed deer and wild turkey as MIS.
- 2) Add Bachman's sparrow and Florida scrub lizard as MIS.
- 3) Discontinue monitoring plants as individual species and focus on species groups designed to more accurately identify impacts of management activities such as fire dependent graminoids. Exceptions include titi and saw palmetto which have been determined to be effective as negative indicators for easily identifying management impacts.

DECISION RATIONALE

The selected alternative will meet the purpose and need by:

- 1) Reducing redundancy. Some MIS are redundant in that several MIS are representing identical communities and habitats. This redundancy is using limited resources for analysis activities that are not providing any additional information on effects to communities and habitats.
- 2) Selecting species that better represent a specific habitat. Species that are habitat generalists may not make good representatives for specific habitats when a more habitat-specific species can be selected.
- 3) Removing from the list MIS whose population trends cannot be tied to management. For some species population trends are difficult to establish, and population fluctuations are due to a combination of factors and events, many of which may be unrelated to national forest management.
- 4) Increasing the efficacy of the MIS list by removing species associated with protected special habitats or areas where management actions are extremely limited such as

Floodplain Swamp, swamps and bogs. In these cases MIS serve no useful purpose for analyzing the effects of management.

The Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Amendment #10 EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in July 1, 2011. A letter was mailed June 23, 2011 notifying 275 individuals, groups and other agencies of our intention and requesting any comments or potential issues on the proposed.

Issues included:

1. **Suitability as an MIS and ability to monitor**

Species selected as MIS should be suitable as management indicators and those that are not suitable should be considered for removal from the existing MIS list. Species selected as MIS should be feasible and reasonable to monitor population trends effectively at the scale of the planning area. The monitoring efforts should be efficient and not duplicate other efforts. The availability of data to reveal species responses to management issues, or ability to collect it, is a fundamental factor to be considered.

2. **Meaningful indicators**

The monitoring of species selected should be able to answer the questions associated with a major management issue facing the Forest. Regulations clarify that species will be selected because their population changes are believed to indicate the effects of management activities. For some major management issues, alternative monitoring approaches may be preferred over MIS in order to more clearly obtain the needed information.

An Environmental Assessment was available for a 30-day public review period beginning on September 15, 2011. No comments were received.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the 1999 National Forest Land Management Plan for the National Forests in Florida.

NFMA Significance:

The Forest Service is currently operating under the November 9, 2000 planning rule and the Interpretive Rule of September 29, 2004. According to 36 CFR 219.35 (and subsequently interpreted in 2004), the responsible official may elect to conduct the plan amendment process under the “1982 planning regulations” (those regulations in effect before November 9, 2000). I have elected to conduct this amendment following the 1982 planning regulations. After reviewing the Environmental Assessment that includes Amendment # 10 to the Forest Plan, I have determined that the decision to implement this amendment will not result in a significant

change to the Forest Plan. This determination was made after consulting 16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(4), 36 CFR 219.10(f) (1982 regulations), Forest Service Manual 1926.51 – *Changes to the Land Management Plan that are Not Significant* and FSM 1926.52 – *Changes to the Land Management Plan that are Significant*. Based on these planning requirements, I have determined that:

- 1) This amendment will not significantly alter the levels of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan; nor will it prevent the opportunity to achieve those outputs in later years. The modifications to the Forest Plan only affect monitoring of Management Indicator Species.
- 2) The amendment will not significantly affect the entire plan or a large portion of the planning area. It will only affect monitoring of Management Indicator Species.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

CONTEXT AND INTENSITY

This amendment would apply to the National Forests in Florida as described in the previous section on NFMA Significance.

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.** Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action.
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because this amendment does not authorize any site specific projects.
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because this amendment does not authorize any site specific projects.
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. In addition, no scientific controversies were identified

through public involvement (See EA page 8). My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. This review complies with the requirement of Best Available Science as described in the 2000 Planning Rule as amended.

5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk.
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because this amendment does not authorize any site specific projects.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts are not significant. No other past, present or future projects were identified which would combine with the effects of this amendment and result in a cumulative effect on any resources analyzed in this EA. This amendment does not authorize any site specific projects.
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed , or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because this amendment does not authorize any site specific projects.
9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because this amendment does not authorize any site specific projects.
10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA page 13-14).

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

For those plan amendments conducted under “1982 planning regulations” the responsible official can elect to use either the “Optional Appeal Procedures Available during the Planning Rule

Transition Period” (the former 36 CFR 217 appeal procedures that were in effect prior to November 9, 2000) or the Objection procedures of 36 CFR 219.32 from the 2000 planning rule (see Appendix A to 36 CFR 219.35 [Federal Register, January 10, 2001]). For this decision, I have decided to use the “Optional Appeal Procedures Available during the Planning Rule Transition Period”. These procedures are available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/includes/PlanAppealProceduresDuringTransition.pdf>

A written appeal must be filed in duplicate, clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal pursuant to the “Optional Appeal Procedures”, and it must meet the content requirements of Section 9 of the Optional Appeal Procedures. Appeals must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record (*Tallahassee Democrat*).

Appeals must be filed with the Regional Forester for the Southern Region at:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: Appeal Reviewing Officer
1720 Peachtree Road, NW, Suite 811N
Atlanta, GA 30309-9102

Appeals may also be faxed to (404) 347-5401 or mailed electronically in a common digital format to appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., closed on federal holidays.

Pursuant to Section 10 of the Optional Appeal Procedures, implementation of this decision will not begin until seven calendar days after the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record. Should any project or activity under this amendment be implemented before an appeal decision can be issued, the Appeal Reviewing Officer will consider written requests to stay implementation of any of those decisions pending completion of the review. To request a stay of implementation, an appellant must file a written request with the Appeal Reviewing Officer, and the request must meet the requirements found in Section 10 of the Optional Appeal Procedures.

The Forest Plan Amendment Project Record is available for public review at the National Forests in Florida Forest Supervisors Office, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303. Questions concerning this document can be directed to David Harris, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303 or (850) 523-8582. This amendment is also available on the internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida>

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation of this decision may occur after seven calendar days following publication of the legal notice of the decision in the Tallahassee Democrat.



CONTACT

The Forest Plan Amendment Project Record is available for public review at the National Forests in Florida Forest Supervisors Office, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303. Copies of the Environmental Assessment and questions concerning this document can be directed to David Harris, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303 or (850) 523-8582. This amendment is also available on the internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida>

SUSAN JEHEBER-MATTHEWS

Date

Forest Supervisor

AMENDED PAGES

The following pages from the 1999 Revised LRMP have been modified based on comments received during public review of the Environmental Assessment.

Deleted language is indicated by a ~~strike through~~. Additions are indicated by **bold** font.

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Table 5.2		
Management Indicators		
Community	Community Indicators	Indicator Species
Bog, Seepage Slope, Depression Marsh, and Wet Prairie/Savannahs	Lack of woody encroachment Dominance of graminoids/forbs Acres and frequency of burning Acres of type Population trends of indicator species	Harper's Beauty Florida Skunkcabbage Wiregrass Toothache Grass Florida Dropseed Godfrey's Butterwort Perennial Fire-Dependent Graminoids
Sandhill, Scrubby Flatwoods, Xeric Hammock, Upland Hardwood Forest, and Slope Forest	Acres and size classes of longleaf pine forest on well drained soils Number and diameter of snags Acres and frequency of burning Acres by age class and forest type Population trends of indicator species	Red-cockaded Woodpecker Bobwhite Quail Bachman's Sparrow Perennial Fire-Dependent Graminoids Sandhills On-site Trees Sandhills Off-site trees Southeastern Kestrel Wiregrass Pinewoods Dropseed Scrub Buckwheat Sand Live Oak
Mesic Flatwoods and Wet Flatwoods	Acres of longleaf, slash, and pond pine forest on poorly drained soils Number and diameter of snags Acres and frequency of burning Acres by age class and forest type Population trends of indicator species	Red-cockaded Woodpecker Bobwhite Quail Perennial Fire-Dependent Graminoids White Birds-in-a-Nest Wiregrass Curtiss Dropseed Florida Dropseed
Bottomland Forest, Floodplain Swamp, Hydric Hammock, Baygall, Strand Swamp, Basin Swamp, and Dome Swamp	Acres and age class by forest types Number and diameter of snags Large trees ≥ 20 inches Population trends of indicator species	Pileated Woodpecker Prothonotary Warbler Bald Eagle Godfrey's Butterwort Xyris striata
Scrub	Acres of sand pine and scrub oak forest types Acres by seral stage Average patch size Number and diameter of snags Distribution of bare ground Population trends of indicator species	Sand Skink Florida Scrub Jay Florida scrub lizard Florida Bonamia Small Lewton's Milkwort Scrub Buckwheat
Aquatic (Lakes/Ponds)	Dissolved oxygen, pH Aquatic vegetation in balance Large patch/nest trees/snags Population trends of indicator species	Bald Eagle Largemouth Bass
Generalists	Population trends of indicator species	Florida Black Bear White-tailed Deer Wild Turkey

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Table 5.3		
Management Indicators Species		
Species	Community	Monitoring Strategy
Animals		
Bald Eagle	Bottomland Forest, Floodplain Swamp, Hydric Hammock, Baygall, Strand Swamp, Basin Swamp, Dome Swamp, and Aquatic (Lakes/Ponds)	Nest monitoring via aircraft, number of active nests, number of chicks, number of fledglings
Bobwhite Quail	Sandhill, Scrubby Flatwoods, Mesic Flatwoods, and Wet Flatwoods	Call-counted routes, co-op stations with Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission
Florida Black Bear	Generalists	Track counts, observation records
Florida Scrub-Jay	Scrub	Occupied stands, trapping and banding birds, number fledged, dispersal, demographics
Florida scrub lizard	Scrub	Stand walk throughs to determine presence or absence.
Largemouth Bass	Aquatic (Lake/Ponds)	Shocking samples, lbs. per acre in lakes and borrow pits
Pileated Woodpecker	Bottomland Forest, Floodplain Swamp, Hydric Hammock, Baygall, Strand Swamp, Basin Swamp, and Dome Swamp	Breeding Bird Survey call routes, R8 landbird routes
Prothonotary Warbler	Bottomland Forest, Floodplain Swamp, Hydric Hammock, Baygall, Strand Swamp, Basin Swamp, and Dome Swamp	Breeding Bird Survey call routes, R8 landbird routes
Red-cockaded Woodpecker	Sandhill, Scrubby Flatwoods, Mesic Flatwoods, and Wet Flatwoods	Nest checks for reproduction, banding, translocation, colony monitoring (RCW EIS Guidelines)
Sand Skink	Scrub	Cover boards for presence, presence of tracks
Southeastern Kestrel	Sandhill and Scrubby Flatwoods	Nest box occupancy
White-tailed Deer	Generalists	Track counts, harvest records
Wild Turkey	Generalists	Bait stations, harvest records
Plants		
Curtiss Dropseed Saw Palmetto Titi	Mesic Flatwoods and Wet Flatwoods	Establish plots in areas of concern to monitor change over time
Florida Bonamia	Scrub	Permanent plots placed in known populations
Florida Dropseed Florida Skulleap Perennial Fire-Dependent Graminoids	Bog, Seepage Slope, Depression Marsh, and Wet Prairie/Savannahs	Establish plots in areas of concern to monitor change over time Permanent plots placed in known populations
RCW – Red-cockaded Woodpecker		EIS – Environmental Impact Statement RCW Recovery Plan

